

**Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women
Bridgewater Public Hearing
Wednesday, March 28, 2007
5:00 – 7:00 p.m.
Bridgewater State College, Bridgewater**

Attendees: April Adema, Louise Badiane, John Briscoe, Ryan Burke, Beryl Domingo, Vincent Faria, Diana Fox, Tina Glidden, Brittany Hillman, Lisa Hurley, Nadia Jensen, Lindsay Joy, Rebecca Leavitt, Tamara Lewis, Linda McCarthy, Cassandra Siegfried, Kathy Teahan, Susan Tower, Kathryn Wentworth, Katelyn Wheeler,

Commissioners: Gloria Coney, Marianne Fleckner, Susanna Segat

Staff: Jill Ashton, Linda Brantley, Paula Daddona, Lucinda Kallis-Hilbert (intern)

Welcome

Commissioner Fleckner opened the hearing at 5:40, introduced her fellow commissioners, and recognized Bridgewater State College President Dana Molher-Faria and former state Representative Kathy Teahan.

Commissioner Coney introduced President Molher-Faria, noting his past and recent accomplishments.

President Molher-Faria welcomed the attendees to the public hearing. He noted that at Bridgewater State College the staff and faculty work to build a community where people feel appreciated and respected based on factors of race, sex, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status. He noted this goal is difficult in the context of today's society, adding that he appreciates the attendees' contribution and recommendations for creating a positive community at BSC and in the larger community.

Testimony

Jean Holmes identified herself as a community member, resident of Brockton, and a mother of 2 children. She noted that she wanted to speak about two very important issues that affect women and community. Ms. Holmes urged more education surrounding human sexuality, in particular the age of consent. She also spoke strongly in support of upholding Title IX and protecting athletics for young women. Ms. Holmes provided a number of examples as to how girl's sports come second to boy's, including choice of fields and equipment availability. She noted that in light of the rise in obesity, discouraging women's athletics is a mistake.

Heather Carpenter, attending on behalf of the Crittenton Women's Union, provided a brief description of the organization's mission. In Brockton, she noted 57% of families in poverty are female headed households. Workforce development and education are important issues for women. Ms. Carpenter reported that less than one third of women who give birth before 18 will finish high school. The CWU has developed tools to help women navigate the challenges of supporting a family and securing job skills and employment. Specifically, the Family Economic Self Sufficiency Standard (FESS) defines actual costs of living; for example in Bridgewater a family of 3 would need at least \$52,000 a year or \$4,400 a month to survive. Hot Jobs is a tool that helps women identify positions which pay a self-sufficient wage; these jobs are high in demand and require only a two year degree. Ms. Carpenter also noted the CWU hosts a blog on their website to talk about issues, identify solutions, and encourage legislative action.

Professor Diana Fox introduced herself as the Bridgewater State College Women's and Gender Studies Coordinator. She spoke briefly about sexual ambiguity, a topic recently taken up for

discussion in her class. She urged a recognition of the issue, broader understanding of sex and increased compassion for this population. Professor Fox also spoke about the lack of information about public services and how to access them. She reported that she has lost students because they have left school to care for sick or struggling family members; she has had members of the community express frustration in finding health, educational, and financial services. She challenged the commissioners to think beyond the internet as the sole resource for researching available services. Professor Fox concluded that the public has a right to know.

Susan Tower from the Brockton Family and Community Resource Center, identified herself as a civilian advocate. She spoke of the lack of affordable housing in the Brockton area. Ms. Tower spoke about a case where a client who was living in her mother's basement with her abuser had her children removed from the home by DSS. In order to have her children returned, DSS mandated that she secure adequate housing on her own. However on her own, she was unable to find housing which she could afford, and has remained dependant on her abuser. Commissioner Coney asked if the organization was working with housing advocates. Ms. Tower responded that there has been a freeze on funds for affordable housing.

Professor Rebecca Leavitt identified herself as the chair of the college's Social Work Department. She voiced concerns of women's access to education and the challenges that they face on campus. Professor Leavitt noted that the high rate of STDs among college aged students is not adequately addressed, date rape is a significant issue on campus, and eating disorders and substance abuse goes unattended. There is no longer a women's center to address the needs of these students. Commissioner Fleckner asked if, and if yes when, was there a women's center. Professor Leavitt responded that four or five years ago a center was open, but had been closed because of funding.

Tina Glidden, the manager of finance and administration for Career Works in Brockton, said that she decided to speak because of the number of young women in the group. She reported that she is a past president of the Brockton Rotary Club. Ms. Gliden noted that young women need to be aware that in order to have our voices heard it is essential to mobilize and involve both women and men in the effort to improve the status of women. She encouraged women to educate themselves and serve as mentors to younger women.

Commissioner Segat, breaking with the formal format of the hearing, asked the attendees how they felt about their experience with pay equality, what was their knowledge around the issue, and what their opinions were in terms of affecting change. She noted that the Commission has committed to helping achieve pay equity for the women of Massachusetts. Executive Director Brantley provided information about the legislation that the Commission has endorsed and how it would be a first step in the process of achieving pay equity by reviewing the state job classification system and correcting the devaluation of typically women's positions. The goal is to begin at the state level with legislation that would ensure equal pay then expand the policy to municipal and contract workers.

Professor Leavitt noted in addition to the issue of equal pay, there needs to be a shift in the workforce to recognize the ever increasing contribution of women and to secure an equitable and fair compensation in pay, benefits and retirement.

Students present in the audience responded to the question and comments. Brittany Hillman responded that she only became aware of the issue during discussion in her classes and that she believes many people do not recognize pay equity as an issue that impacts their lives. Lisa

Hurley noted that while she believes that pay inequity is common knowledge, the scope of inequity and the magnitude of the impact unequal pay is less well known.

Ms. Glidden suggested that women have allowed the issue of pay equity to be forgotten and dismissed. Instead women's role in the workforce comes second to their role in the home as a wife or mother.

Professor Nadia Jensen, a Professor at Massasoit Community College, urged increased involvement of women in politics. There are a number of issues, such as education which we know to be important to women's self-sufficiency, that are decided by public policy. Professor Jensen said that women need to be registered to vote and they need to be active in improving their communities.

Former Representative and visiting Professor Teahan echoed the sentiments, speaking from an insider perspective. She noted that the important issues are no longer reported on the evening news and that women have a responsibility to educate themselves and then advocate for their rights. She noted a few current issues that women should be concerned with including the recent immigration raid in New Bedford, the war in Iraq and cuts to state social services. Professor Teahan concluded by noting that women make up 25% of the state legislature; the number needs to be increased and women need to hold their government accountable.

Ms. Hurley asked to formally present testimony. She spoke about her experience as a "jock" and the challenges she faced as a female athlete. She noted that there were no pep rallies for girls, they played on the second field, and their uniforms were never as nice. Ms. Hurley asked the group to reflect on how young girls learn to value themselves as athletes (or as future women) if the schools and the community continually devalue them.

Ryan Bourke, a student at BSC, also took the opportunity to offer testimony. He spoke to an early comment on the lack of information of services and advocacy programs. Mr. Bourke informed the group that his mother works at a women and families center at Children's Hospital in Boston that provides information and referrals. He urged greater coordination of these centers.

Adjourn

Commissioner Fleckner thanked the attendees for sharing their comments with the Commission. The hearing was adjourned at 7:00.